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Leveraging Observations of Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan for Global Operations

Leslie Adrienne Payne, Jan Osburg



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Preface

The U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan nears the end of its long trajectory, and efforts have shifted from combat-centric operations to Advise and Assist operations meant to empower and professionalize the host nation's security forces. Security Force Assistance (SFA) is currently the main effort in Afghanistan and will likely play a significant role in U.S. defense policy beyond the Afghan theater. Retaining, collating, and analyzing current SFA efforts will help future Advise and Assist operations reduce the risk of repeating mistakes and improving the chance of success of future efforts across the globe.

Between January and April 2013, RAND researchers interviewed 67 advisors and SFA practitioners at the tactical and operational levels. This report presents results of these interviews. The interviewers address challenges that stem from the operational environment that are unique to SFA and problems that arise from the way the U.S. Army is conducting SFA operations. This report should interest those involved in designing SFA policy and doctrine and those advising SFA operations in the field.

This research was sponsored by the U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group and conducted within the RAND Arroyo Center's Force Development and Technology Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the United States Army.

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) requested that the RAND Corporation conduct a study on how to leverage observations from Security Force Assistance (SFA) efforts in Afghanistan for global operations. Between January and April 2013, RAND researchers interviewed a total of 67 advisors and SFA practitioners at the tactical and operational levels—the majority of whom were based in Afghanistan's Regional Command East (RC-East)—in order to collect their firsthand insights into SFA. Interviewees included members of Security Force Assistance Teams (SFATs) and Special Forces Operational Detachments—Alpha (ODAs), senior leadership at the brigade level, and AWG Operational Advisors (OAs).

Many challenges recognized by the interviewed advisors have been well documented in the past decade. Yet the enduring nature of most of these challenges suggests that solutions still remain uncertain. The results indicate that SFA efforts in future theaters will benefit from the following suggestions:

- Modernize Army advising and combat-related narratives to generate capable and confident SFA advisors.
- Aggressively leverage the experience and institutional knowledge gained by Special Forces conducting Foreign Internal Defense (FID).
- Continue to seek out the best advisor candidates.
- Recognize that good training takes time.¹
- Ensure that attention to the mission's end state overrides attention to advisors' personal end states.
- Remain focused on team operations and security during the advising mission.
- Maintain mental and cerebral fortitude while advising.
- Communicate and adhere to existing doctrine.

Future SFA missions, such as those envisioned for the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces, can benefit from the experience gained from SFA in Afghanistan, as captured, for example, in the insights above. These lessons need to be incorporated both at the institutional level and by individual SFA advisors.

¹ Results of Headquarters International Security Assistance Force Joint Command SFAT Lessons Learned Section, 2012.

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Abbreviations

ADS	Afghan National Security Forces Development Section
AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOB	advanced operations base
AOR	area of responsibility
AWG	Asymmetric Warfare Group
BDE	brigade
CALL	Center for Army Lessons Learned
CF	Coalition Forces
CJ7	Information Operations/Psychological Operations
COA	course of action
COCOM	combatant command
COIN	counterinsurgency
CS	combat support
CSS	combat service support
CW3	chief warrant officer 3
DA	Department of the Army
DCO	deputy commanding officer
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
FM	field manual
FSF	foreign security force
GSU	garrison support unit
HN	host nation
HNSF	host-nation security force
HQ	headquarters
IJC	International Security Assistance Force Joint Command
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JAG	judge advocate general
JCISFA	Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance
JFC Brunssum	Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum
JP	joint publication
JRSOI	joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration
JRTC	Joint Readiness Training Center
KD	key and developmental
LEP	law enforcement professional
MATA	military assistance and training advisory
MOE	measure of effectiveness
MOP	measure of performance
OA	Operational Advisor

OCCP	operational coordination center, provincial
ODA	Operational Detachment–Alpha
OIC	Officer-in-Charge
PACE	primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency
PAO	public affairs officer
PAT	police advisory trainer
PHQ	provincial headquarters
PLB	personal locator beacon
POI	program of instruction
RAB	regionally aligned brigade
RAF	Regionally Aligned Forces
RC-East	Regional Command East
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
S3	brigade operations officer
S9	brigade civil affairs officer
SA	Security Assistance
SC	Security Cooperation
SF	Special Forces
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SFAB	Security Force Assistance brigade
SFAT	Security Force Assistance Team
SME	subject-matter expert
STT	Security Transition Team
TRADOC	U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command
USARAF	U.S. Army Africa
XO	executive officer

Chapter One. Introduction

The protracted military campaign in Afghanistan nears the end of its trajectory. Efforts have shifted from combat-centric operations, in which Coalition Forces (CF) played a visible and prominent role, to Advise and Assist operations meant to empower and professionalize the host nation's security forces. Security Force Assistance (SFA) is currently the main effort in Afghanistan and will likely play a significant role in U.S. defense policy beyond the Afghan theater. Retaining, collating, and analyzing current SFA efforts will help future Advise and Assist operations reduce the risk of repeating mistakes and improving the chance of success of future efforts across the globe.

To this end, the U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) requested that RAND study and assess the Afghanistan SFA experience in ways that will support and enhance future SFA processes and methods. AWG's commitment to remain informed about the status and progression of SFA efforts complements its broader mandate of assisting in the development of Army capabilities across the domains of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities. AWG works across multiple disciplines in support of ongoing operations and in anticipation of future operations; knowing which challenges to SFA continue to present a problem to the Army can help prioritize future mitigation efforts implemented at the structural and institutional levels. Many challenges, such as low morale among SFA personnel, have been well documented in the past decade. Yet the enduring nature of most of these challenges suggests that solutions still remain beyond our grasp.

Study Scope

This study presented the perspectives of current SFA practitioners in the Afghan theater and seeks to inform the SFA policy and doctrine discussion by suggesting how practitioners' insights can be leveraged in future SFA operations. Our interviewees, primarily SFA practitioners at the tactical and operational levels with firsthand experience in advising at the brigade level and below, recognized two distinct but interrelated types of challenges. The first type of challenge is *foundational* or *structural* and has to do with how the Army perceives, values, and incentivizes advising compared with how it perceives, values, and incentivizes other military occupation specialties. The second type of challenge is *operational*: These problems arise from the way the Army is conducting SFA operations and can include the training and performance of advisors themselves.

Like the interviewees, we identify many foundational problems, but the primary objective of this report is to inform policies and principles applicable to future SFA missions by providing a

substantive view of how operational-level practitioners view their SFA mission at this stage of the Afghan campaign and what suggestions they have regarding the future of their trade.

Although the focus here is placed primarily on operational challenges, there is merit in examining both types together. An understanding of foundational catalysts (i.e., structural and institutional underpinnings) can explain why current SFA missions continue to be burdened by many of the same problems that have been well documented over the years. For example, large-scale SFA missions in Vietnam also suffered from personnel issues. Like they have in Afghanistan, many Soldiers preferred Combat Arms assignments, which they viewed as more prestigious than other types of assignments. But, although many analysts continue to examine the challenges surrounding SFA, conversations rarely focus on how actual SFA advisors deal with the enduring nature of these taxing problems. Focusing on the tactical and operational levels and providing firsthand accounts of how advisors view the Advise and Assist mission humanizes the debate and underscores the need for institutional change if the U.S. Army is going to conduct SFA more successfully in the future.

Study Methods

The RAND research team partnered with AWG personnel to conduct field research for this SFA study. The results are based on insights from 67 individuals who were interviewed between January and April 2013 in order to collect their observations and insights on current SFA efforts. The majority of these interviews were conducted with serving Army advisors in Afghanistan's Regional Command East (RC-East). Although some individuals were interviewed in groups, most were interviewed in a one-on-one setting, using a semistructured approach. Timeline and transportation limitations prevented the population sample from being fully representative. Nevertheless, the firsthand insights that were collected resulted in a robust and helpful snapshot of current SFA efforts. The average interview length was one hour and 20 minutes. Twelve core questions were addressed, with the aim of eliciting not just SFA insights from current practitioners but also guidance on implementation in future theaters. Using the same question set for all study participants allowed for the quantifying of information and the identification of trends and prominent themes. Although most drew from their experiences in Afghanistan, interviewees were asked to frame their insights in a generalized way in order to assess the insights' global applicability.

A wide net was cast in selecting interviewees, with focus on practitioners at the tactical and operational levels, who had firsthand experience in advising at the brigade level and below. Security Force Assistance Teams (SFATs)—usually consisting of 12–16 individuals—are the lead U.S. military entity currently conducting SFA, but there are many other battlespace actors that are likewise engaged in Advise and Assist missions. Although the insights provided by interviewees were instrumental in providing a current and realistic depiction of SFA efforts and remaining challenges, those views do not represent particular organizations or the U.S. Army as

a whole. Recognizing early on that a diverse population sample would yield more-comprehensive results, we sought to incorporate additional perspectives. Table 1.1 shows the full range of interviewees.

Table 1.1. Number and Background of Interviewees

Type	Number of Interviews	Total Interviewees
General SFAT	8	8
STT	1 group interview	7
AWG OA	6	6
GSU SFAT	1 group interview	3
CS SFAT	1	1
CSS SFAT	2 group interviews	14
ANA BDE SFAT	1 group interview	3
SFAB ANSF Development Cell (JAG, PAO, ADS, S3, S9)	5	5
Level 2 SFAT advisors	2	2
U.S. SF ODA	3 team interviews	11
LEP advisors	1	1
OCCP advisors	1	1
PHQ advisors	1	1
Brigade DCO	2	2
SFAT Officer-in-Charge for 3 RC-E provinces	1	1
PAT	1	1
Total	37	67

NOTE: STT = Security Transition Team. OA = Operational Advisor. GSU = garrison support unit. CS = combat support. CSS = combat service support. ANA = Afghan National Army. BDE = brigade. SFAB = SFA brigade. ANSF = Afghan National Security Forces. JAG = judge advocate general. PAO = public affairs officer. ADS = ANSF Development Section. S3 = brigade operations officer. S9 = brigade civil affairs officer. SF = Special Forces. ODA = Operational Detachment–Alpha. LEP = law enforcement professional. OCCP = operational coordination center, provincial. PHQ = provincial headquarters. DCO = deputy commanding officer. DCO = deputy commanding officer. PAT = police advisory trainer.

In addition to these interviews, other sources of information include literature research and insights shared by the participants of the 2013 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) SFA Workshop at Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC Brunssum) and the 2013 ISAF Joint Command (IJC) SFA Symposium in Kabul.²

² The ISAF SFA and Insider Threat Workshop was held at JFC Brunssum, The Netherlands, January 31–February 6, 2013. The IJC SFA Symposium was held in Kabul, Afghanistan, February 11, 2013.

Study Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study suggests that the reader approach the findings with an understanding of the limitations of this approach. By nature, qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data that cannot be reduced to numbers; our primary data relate to the concepts and thoughts of Army advisors enacting SFA and are certainly not representative of all personnel taking part in such operations. Although many of the viewpoints gleaned during interviews do not offer particularly new insights pertaining to the SFA challenges, the interviews do substantiate many of the known challenges and can be used to leverage policy change.

Organization of This Report

This report is organized as follows. Following the introduction to the topic and overview of the study approach and methodology, Chapter Two provides further context to the study by defining key terms and describing the SFA process as presented by current doctrine. Chapter Three presents the findings by drawing on the interview data collected throughout the study. Chapter Four examines interviewees' concerns with understanding the challenges faced by SFA operations through the theoretical lens of the Development Paradox. We close with Chapter Five, which summarizes key findings for decisionmakers interested in further developing the policy and doctrine supporting SFA operations.

Chapter Two. The Security Force Assistance Process

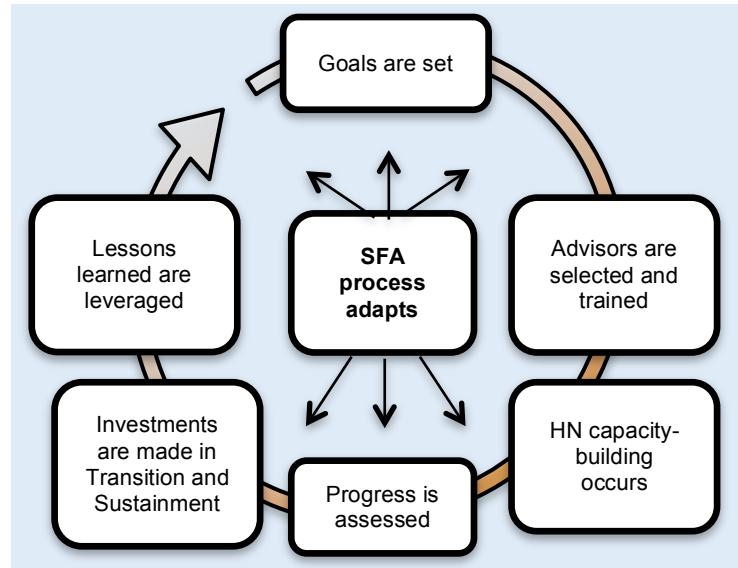
To provide greater context to the study findings, this chapter describes the SFA process using three conceptual frameworks. First, we present an idealized depiction of SFA operations based on a subsequent study of information found in Chapter Four of Field Manual (FM) 3-22, which discusses SFA tasks and mission objectives.³ The second framework is based on the current state of affairs and drawn from the interviews conducted for this research. The third is a “best-case” scenario of how SFA should look, according to the testimony provided by the participants in this study. The second and third frameworks especially work to contextualize participants’ responses to the interview questions. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief description of several key SFA concepts that are necessary for the appropriate understanding of the findings described in later chapters.

Ideal Security Force Assistance Missions Are Defined by Achievable Goals

In an ideal SFA mission, achievable goals are set early in the process, advisors are trained appropriately, and capacity building and advising of the host nation (HN) occurs concurrently and is followed by transition and sustainment. Finally, lessons learned and best practices are leveraged. In this model, the process is adaptive and information is continually exchanged (Figure 2.1).

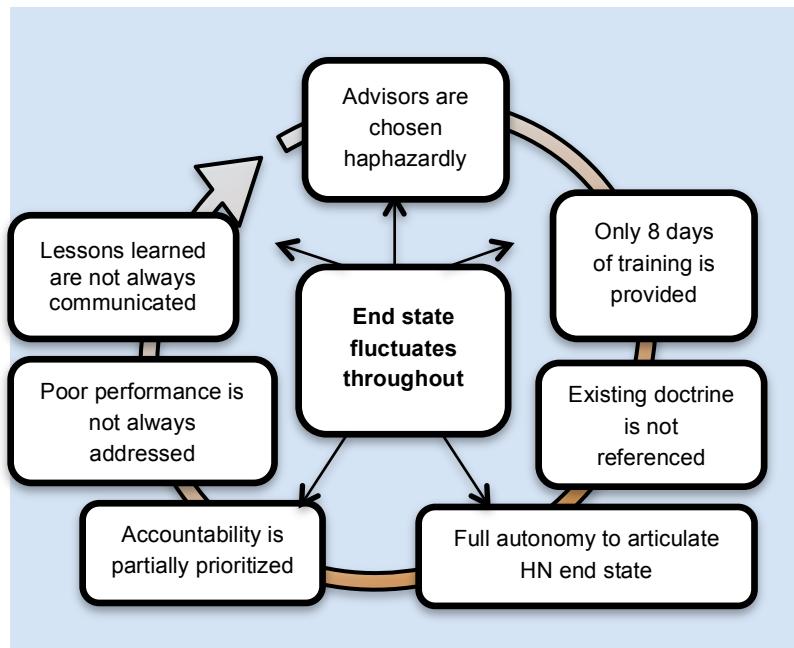
³ Osburg, 2013; FM 3-22.

Figure 2.1. Idealized Depiction of Security Force Assistance



This idealized notion of SFA drastically differs from how teams are currently conducting Advise and Assist missions in such places as Afghanistan (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Current Configuration of Security Force Assistance According to Interviewee Responses



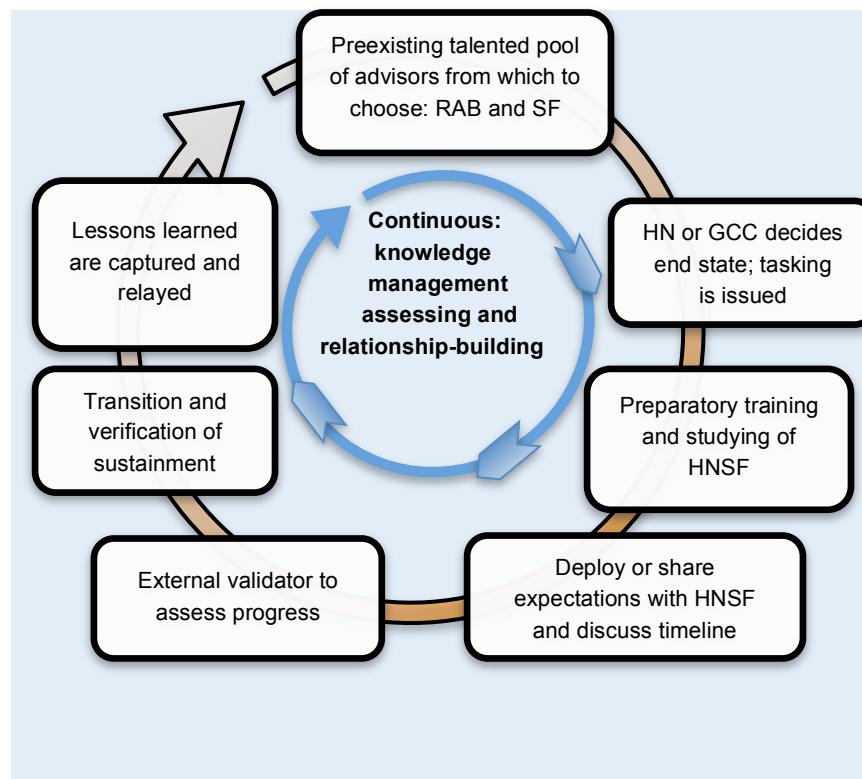
Respondents stated that SFA is implemented much differently from the idealized model. Approximately 42 respondents described training as too short and limited, and 39 said that

doctrine that is intended to provide foundational support is rarely utilized. Most glaringly, individual teams in the field, rather than the HN, determine the end state of SFA efforts. Interviewees also claimed that poor performers are infrequently cited and that lessons learned are neither retained nor communicated to higher (HQ) headquarters elements.

“Best-Case” Scenario Benefits from Personnel-Related Policy Change

Current SFA practitioners expressed hope that recent changes to doctrinal, recruiting, training, and execution approaches can positively affect the next major SFA campaign and allow for the realization of the aspirational model of SFA (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Aspirational Model of Security Force Assistance



NOTE: RAB = regionally aligned BDE. HNSF = HN security forces.

Well-trained and motivated advisors working toward an end state that is jointly articulated by the HN and geographic combatant command characterize this third framework. Advisors are aware of the security institutions of the HN and have objective means to assess progress, a clear approach to transition and sustainment, and the commitment to retain lessons learned and best practices. Knowledge management, the building of relationships, and the assessing of progress occur continuously.

Defining Security Force Assistance–Related Concepts

Security Cooperation (SC), Security Assistance (SA), SFA, and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) are different concepts with complementary end states. Figure 2.4 demonstrates the relationships between the concepts and shows how the latter three are subsets of SC.⁴

Figure 2.4. Relationship Between Security Cooperation, Security Assistance, Security Force Assistance, and Foreign Internal Defense

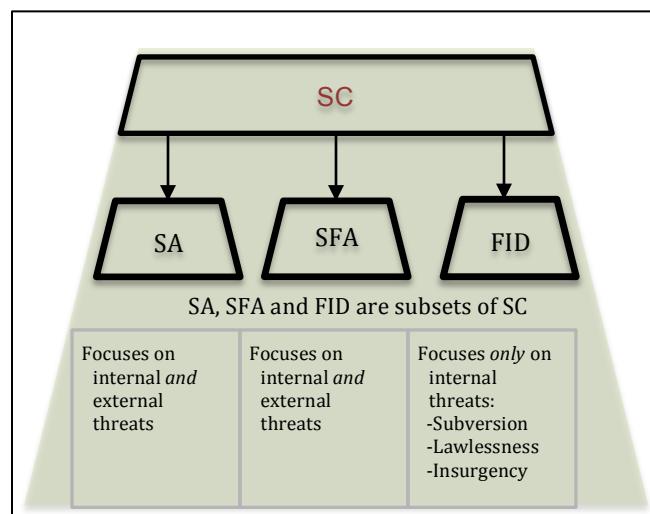


Figure 2.5 provides a truncated definition of each and depicts the close connection between SFA and FID.⁵ A more detailed comparison of SFA and FID can be found in FM 3-22, Chapter Four of Joint Publication (JP) 3-22,⁶ and *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JP 1-02.

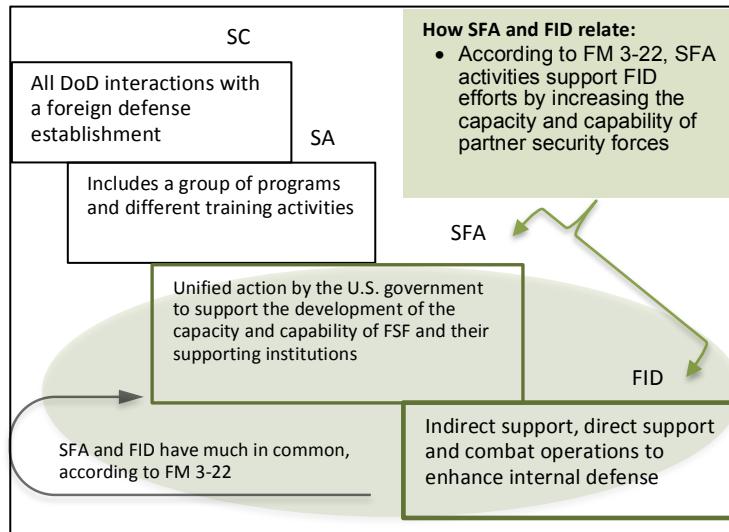
⁴ FM 3-22, ¶¶ 1-42-1-58.

⁵ FM 3-22, ¶¶ 1-48, 1-56.

⁶ Paragraphs 1-42-1-58 of FM 3-22 provide detailed descriptions of SFA, SC, SA, and FID, in addition to information on how the four relate to one another. Chapter Four of JP 3-22 contains detailed information on how SFA is defined in relation to FID, specifically pp. V-31–V-33. It states,

At operational and strategic levels, both SFA and FID focus on preparing FSF [foreign security forces] to combat lawlessness, subversion, insurgency, and terrorism from internal threats; however, SFA also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of an international coalition as well. FID and SFA are similar at the tactical level where advisory skills are applicable to both. Both FID and SFA are subsets of SC. Neither FID nor SFA [is a subset] of [the] other.

Figure 2.5. How Security Force Assistance and Foreign Internal Defense Relate



NOTE: DoD = U.S. Department of Defense.

Both SFA and FID engage in efforts to organize, train, equip, and advise foreign security forces⁷—much of which occurs at the tactical and operational levels—as well as the critical task of relationship building. SC and SA efforts are present but tend to have less visibility than the urgent requirements of SFA and FID have.

This study observed debate by SFA practitioners over whether those adept at FID could effectively absorb the SFA mission and vice versa. Neither the study nor this report is the proper venue for such a discussion, but the frequency with which respondents mentioned the relationship between SFA and FID suggests that further analysis and assessments are needed.

⁷ FM 3-22, ¶¶ 1-48, 1-56.

Chapter Three. Identifying and Leveraging Key Security Force Assistance Insights

This chapter presents and assesses key insights from the SFA subject-matter experts (SMEs) throughout Afghanistan's RC-E who were interviewed for this research. Statements are grouped thematically and ordered in such a way that reflects on the frequency by which they were mentioned. A set of representative quotes from SFA practitioners introduces each theme; we then examine these through an analytical lens that provides background information on how insights were identified by advisors in the field. Each section closes by offering suggestions as to how interviewees' insights may be leveraged in future SFA operations.

1. Incentivizing Security Force Assistance Will Improve the Talent Pool for Future Missions

Hire the right people for the job, because all it takes is a single point of failure to totally invalidate a whole team's efforts.⁸—SFAT advisors

As long as senior officials refuse to recognize the importance or criticality of advising, they are not going to genuinely prioritize SFA.⁹—BDE lieutenant colonel

There must be a recognition that the advising mission is an enduring one, and an organization should be created that specializes in advising.¹⁰—BDE lieutenant colonel

Many feel that being an advisor hurts their career [and] diminishes prospects for promotion and say they are being coerced into accepting the mission.¹¹—BDE lieutenant colonel and S3

In order to increase willingness and enthusiasm, being on an SFAT should be considered a key and developmental [KD] position.¹²—SFAT Officer-in-Charge (OIC)

The U.S. Army should pull people from across the Army [who] have already done their KD time.¹³—BDE lieutenant colonel and S3

⁸ Group interview with three SFAT advisors who train an ANA BDE, March 20, 2013.

⁹ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

¹⁰ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

¹¹ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and an S3 from the ANSF Development Cell of a BDE, March 18, 2013.

¹² Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who was the OIC for SFATs in three provinces, March 1, 2013.

Many end up on SFA missions because they recently come out of ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], have high “dwell time,” and are therefore pressured to deploy.¹⁴—SFAT advisors

You cannot take a BDE from a unit like the 82nd Airborne Division, which continually thinks about highly kinetic engagements, and make them advisors capable of understanding complex human dynamics after just two weeks’ worth of training.¹⁵—BDE lieutenant colonel

As these examples suggest, advisors frequently spoke of the low regard many had for advising. Twenty-one interviewees said that they believed that haphazard and indiscriminate methods were used to determine who would be chosen for Advise and Assist missions, which often resulted in subpar candidates who lacked enthusiasm for their jobs. Paradoxically, these very missions are now being flagged by the U.S. Army as both the primary effort in the Afghan theater and the future way ahead for operations in other theaters. The majority of these other theaters may be in a peacetime setting, and SFA may take on a hybrid appearance in which advising is mixed with a form of partnered training. However different SFA may look in the future, it likely will not resemble direct-action combat missions. So, Soldiers inherently uninterested in advising because they find more merit in combat-oriented missions are likely to encounter the same dissatisfaction in future theaters. The fix is rooted in not just incentivizing the advising mission and improving training but also changing the entrenched military narrative that infantry and combat-related positions confer the most prestige, manliness, and status.

Thirteen SFAT members said that they viewed their Advise and Assist assignments as “career killers” within the Army. And, in five cases, advisors spoke of low morale giving way to depression with those who longed for more combat-oriented assignments. Approximately 12 of those 13 advisors said that they would have preferred a command assignment because of the inherent prestige associated with such positions. Three Soldiers said that they were made advisors simply because they had high dwell time and the Army had to quickly fill its manning requirements. Telling is the fact that a majority of the 67 interviewees opined that the processes were not in place to choose the right individuals for the Advise and Assist mission, for which they blamed the lack of interest many had for SFA compared with interest in traditional combat missions.

Leveraging the Observation

Morale and enthusiasm for the advising mission will continue to be closely linked with the performance and delivered results of advisors. Because future operations in such theaters as U.S.

¹³ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and an S3 from the ANSF Development Cell of a BDE, March 18, 2013.

¹⁴ Group interview with three SFAT advisors who train an ANA BDE, March 20, 2013.

¹⁵ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

Africa Command (AFRICOM) will involve U.S. Army advisors interacting with HNSF that have stronger foundations and military institutions than those currently found in the Afghan theater, having genuinely capable and confident advisors would be a necessary prerequisite for success. Establishing a comprehensive selection program that identifies Soldiers with the aptitude and desire for advising will help with achieving this objective.

Sixteen interviewees identified the first rectification step as changing the Army's advising and combat-related narratives. Yet, current SFA doctrine already portrays the professionalization of an HN's security forces as the first line of defense. Somehow, this fails to translate into a constructive narrative that spurs recruitment and training. The rest of the effort lies with the incentivizing of advising: Military leaders should challenge their Soldiers to internalize the necessity of the Advise and Assist mission, and such missions should be designated as KD¹⁶ and should be as professionally rewarding as Combat Arms positions. The first of these three incentives is most important and relates to the need for a revamped and modernized SFA narrative. Although four interviewees mentioned the desire for compensation pay, most expressed a preference for their leadership to lead by example and embrace the advising mission with vigor. Only then, they said, will advisors see the true merit in both peacetime and wartime SFA.

2. The Army Should Build on Special Forces Practices and Training

ODAs [Operational Detachments–Alpha] are best placed to do the SFA mission: they prioritize being detail-oriented while building relationships with host nation security forces, operate well within ambiguity, are mature regarding experience and age, and have an incentivized monetary rewards system.¹⁷—SFAT advisors

SOF units excel at Advise and Assist missions and should have the lead with SFA. They go back to the same area repeatedly and build the necessary relationships. They know the necessary people and elders and build up the institutional knowledge that's required to do SFA correctly.¹⁸—BDE lieutenant colonel

The Army looks to create the RAB, but SF groups are already regionally aligned and mission ready. Why gamble on something new when something better exists?¹⁹—SF advanced operations base (AOB) chief warrant officer 3 (CW3)

¹⁶ We recognize the difficulty that may arise from the Army sweepingly designating all advisory assignments as KD. During the course of this study, both viewpoints were expressed, but more interviewees than not voiced their support for such assignments being considered KD. Those who felt differently hypothesized that inundating the Army with more KD positions would be counterproductive and divisive, with KD advising assignments eventually viewed as second-class jobs for those who could not excel in tactically oriented KD positions.

¹⁷ Interview with a U.S. Army captain (company commander) and his executive officer (XO), both of whom are Level 2 SFAT advisors, March 18, 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

¹⁹ Interview with an SF AOB CW3 operations officer, March 26, 2013.

SF [are] great at organizing at the company level and below. They can go in and teach platoon, company, and squad tactics to the host nation. Your older guys and conventional army guys can teach staff-level stuff.²⁰—BDE lieutenant colonel

One of the intangibles with SFA is building relationships—which ODA does well and the Army doesn't prioritize as much. A professional relationship takes you only so far, and an individual relationship takes you that much further. You must strike the perfect balance between the two. But you can't train on how to build a personal relationship; that's why it's an intangible.²¹—ODA group interview

The best SFAT teams [sic] are those with SF leadership.²²—ODA group interview

We take security very seriously. SF units are [weapon status] “red” all the time, but we still live, eat, exercise, and fight with the guys we advise. Creating that bond is essential.²³—SF AOB commander

The Army is tasking conventionally minded Soldiers with a[n] SF FID mission and not allowing for SF oversight of their efforts.²⁴—SF AOB CW3

ODA teams are force multipliers, and hopefully Big Army can professionalize their SFA teams so that they are as well. An effective advisor team has the potential to affect two or three countries around the one they're operating in.²⁵—ODA commander

Many interviewees mentioned the successes ODAs have had advising and training HNSF. ODA and SFAT members alike opined that SF were best placed to conduct SFA and FID in other theaters because of the depth and intricacy of their personnel selection and training. Most commonly mentioned was the amount of time devoted to learning the complexities of relationship building—which is continually hailed as the key to SFA success. Next was the ability for SF to feel comfortable operating under ambiguous circumstances. Finally, more than 39 interviewees mentioned the obvious discrepancy between the two training cycles: Although it may vary with different occupational specialties within SF, teams devote an average of two years to FID training and assign personnel to global regions. And, as a result, SF Soldiers develop expertise on the environments in which they operate and on the inhabitants of those environments. They also leverage their reservoir of local knowledge. SFATs, by comparison, currently receive two weeks' worth of training at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC),

²⁰ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

²¹ Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013.

²² Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013; interview with an ODA commander, March 27, 2013.

²³ Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 25, 2013.

²⁴ Interview with an SF AOB CW3 operations officer, March 26, 2013.

²⁵ Interview with an ODA commander, March 27, 2013.

located at Fort Polk, Louisiana, with an additional five to seven days once in Afghanistan.²⁶ Cumulatively, this simply is not enough training.

ODAs said that U.S. Army SFATs and STTs must have constant interaction with their SFA counterparts in order for the latter to truly internalize what they are taught and to ensure sustainability. They decry what SFATs label as Level 2 advising and claim that not even security restrictions should limit constant partnering with the HNSF being mentored. SF operators also said that the Army must “advertise and sell how instrumental advising is” in order to improve its current processes and implement SFA in other challenging environments. Citing AFRICOM as an example, an SF AOB commander with experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kenya, and Korea said that training SFA advisors in unconventional warfare would help them excel in countries that are different from Afghanistan, yet equally difficult.²⁷ The same commander adamantly suggested that the Army prioritize recruiting well-seasoned, professionally mature advisors with a penchant for interpersonal communication for future SFA missions. This can be accomplished, he said, by judicious screening, aptitude testing, and increased physical fitness requirements.

Leveraging the Observation

Well-trained SFA teams that have genuine camaraderie; smart, charismatic, and motivated advisors; and the necessary commitment to do the job correctly will improve their operational outcomes.²⁸ The same SF AOB commander mentioned above said that, in the future, SFATs will benefit from being “unit internal” rather than cobbled together from disparate units and that this will yield a better product in the end. On a related note, during a group interview with nine ODA members, it was mentioned that not enough training on the psychology of human behavior is provided by the Army. This group of interviewees also predicted that SFA teams would perform much better in the future if they first built strong bonds within their own advisor teams, understood the underpinnings of those bonds, and then replicated that solidarity with their HN counterparts.

A June 2012 Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis publication, *Decade of War, Vol. I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations* contains a recommendation for SFA that complements the observations above. It states that the U.S. Army should “Re-establish a Military Assistance and Training Advisory (MATA) course to promote effective partnering and advising. This course should capitalize on recent lessons and Special Forces expertise with regard to FID and SFA operations.”²⁹

²⁶ A recent development has been the instituting of joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (JRSOI) training in Afghanistan, which some SFATs have been able to attend.

²⁷ Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 25, 2013.

²⁸ Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 25, 2013.

²⁹ Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, 2012, p. 34.

3. Regionally Aligned Forces Must Master the Difficulties and Nuances of Relationship Building

With the Regionally Aligned Brigade concept, it may be hard for the Army to regionally align, train, and deploy conventional army units, and it may be easier to just field more ODA teams to do SFA and FID.³⁰—ODA group interview

The Army mind set is dead-set on maneuver warfare and tank warfare, and it is not certain [that the Army] can make a genuine switch to developing regionally aligned brigades that specialize on [such] tasks . . . as advising.³¹—SF AOB CW3

It is a very real possibility that, in the future, host-nation training requests, which are usually fielded to SF units from the geographic combatant command, a RAB must be able to execute an SFA mission as well as a[n] SF unit could.³²—SF AOB commander

As the Army looks to develop the RAB concept and plan for operations in future theaters, [it] will have difficulty getting senior leaders [who] think in a very Afghan-centric way to focus on new training environments and divorce themselves from the Afghan paradigm.³³—CSS kandak advisor

Efforts will have to be devoted to the generation of mid- and senior-level leaders who have nothing but Iraq and Afghanistan experience. The RAB will have to figure out how to be relevant and current.³⁴—ODA group interview

The success of the U.S. Army's first Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF), which are currently dedicated to AFRICOM, will rest in large measure on the RAF's ability to overcome shortcomings experienced by many SFA teams in the Afghan theater. This will have to include obtaining a higher level of cultural knowledge and training on how to leverage that information. The past few years in Afghanistan has demonstrated the operational necessity for skilled and committed advisors, and many are expectant that the RAF will excel in areas that have previously troubled SFA advisors—such as choosing the right advisors for the mission and teaching them how to successfully build and leverage relationships. An SF ODA commander with substantial experience advising and training Afghan local police said a RAB, or RAF in general, is a great concept but that personnel and leadership selection for such units will be critical.³⁵

³⁰ Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013.

³¹ Interview with an SF AOB CW3 operations officer, March 26, 2013.

³² Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 25, 2013.

³³ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

³⁴ Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013.

³⁵ Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 26, 2013.

Leveraging the Observation

A primary driver behind determining which SFA best practices can be exported to other theaters is the recent and unprecedeted dedication of a U.S. BDE to AFRICOM. U.S. Army Africa (USARAF) and AFRICOM leaders will now have to ensure that new and helpful doctrine—such as FM 3-22—is utilized in readying Soldiers for RAF missions and that lessons learned on critical topics, such as relationship building, are leveraged. The Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) and the Joint Center for International Security Force Assistance (JCISFA)—both of which are critical to the knowledge-management component of SFA—will also play an important role with the recently fielded RAF. Finally, current advisors in Afghanistan who are unfamiliar with the RAF and RAB need to be acquainted with the concept prior to redeploying. Knowing that the success of the RAF rests in large part on their own observations, insights, and lessons learned, returning advisors may approach the postdeployment activities described in §§ 5-66–5-76 of FM 3-22 with a heightened sense of energy and urgency.

4. Advisors Must Remain Security Focused

A permissible advising environment can turn into an impermissible and hostile one, so remember to build contingency plans into your original mission analysis.³⁶—AWG OA

All your words count, given your level of influence as an American military advisor. Everything you say has the potential to have second- and third-order effects, even when associating casually. Nothing is off the record.³⁷—AWG OA

Have contingency plans for when things go sour: Know that external events that may be totally unrelated to the host-nation country you are in can affect your advising mission.³⁸—AWG OA

Ensure [that] you have extra medical training for your team, like trauma medical training and knowledge on how to treat common sicknesses. [This] should be a must because, when you're advising in a foreign place, you may not be able to rely on the host nation for medical services and you have to have a backup plan. Have a medical COA [course-of-action] plan with several alternatives.³⁹—AWG OA

Building your [advising] team and achieving a state of readiness [are] precursor[s] to working with your host-nation counterpart and helping to professionalize [it].⁴⁰—BDE S3

³⁶ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

³⁷ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

³⁸ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

³⁹ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁴⁰ Interview with a BDE S3, March 21, 2013.

Know the host nation's communication system: Do you have a tactical radio? Will you be using local phones? What local networks are available in the host nation? Do you know how to dial? You should develop a PACE [primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency] plan, which should be both voice and data and based on the communication networks of your host nation.⁴¹—AWG OA

AWG's OAs discussed in detail the varied obligations of advisors executing SFA missions—with the most overlooked obligation being the need to operationally prepare one's team and maintain a steady security posture. Related to this is understanding that a friendly, permissible environment always has the potential to quickly turn hostile.⁴² Advisors and trainers have witnessed this firsthand with the spate of insider attacks in Afghanistan; however, 11 respondents said that conducting SFA in a new environment that is less combat-centric may invite too relaxed of a security posture. The hard part will be for advisors to portray an image of trust, confidence, and casualness around their counterparts while remaining in a state of vigilance. An SF commander reinforced this insight when stating, “we take security very seriously. SF units are [weapon status] ‘red’ all the time, but we still live, eat, exercise, and fight with the guys we advise. . . .”⁴³

Leveraging the Observation

There is always potential for a peaceful environment to morph into a threatening environment, and identifying the indicators or causal factors is often difficult. The nature of the advising mission often inaccurately implies a low threat potential of such missions. On more than one occasion, advisors compared doing SFA with being a teacher or instructor in the United States. Unfortunately, describing the SFA mission as being slow paced, low risk and non-combat-focused reinforces this misperception. Most importantly, erroneous assumptions, such as these, can inhibit proper contingency planning. “Assumptions can be detrimental and deprive you of realistic interpretations of a situation,” so advising teams should have both a “go-to-hell plan” and a “go-to-hell bag.”⁴⁴ An AWG OA also said,

Because you can't remove the malicious threat or mentality from your operational environment when advising, you should always remain switched on. Know the location of major trauma centers and hospitals, always have a trauma bag and PLB [personal locator beacon] ready, and have maps with key points, like hospitals, identified. Also know about the vehicles you are traveling in.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁴² Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁴³ Interview with an SF AOB commander, March 25, 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁴⁵ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

5. Personality and Behavioral Dynamics Will Unequivocally Affect Security Force Assistance Outcomes

To recruit good advisors, look for people [who] respect the Army Core Values because they are synonymous with the core principles of SFA.⁴⁶—BDE lieutenant colonel

How well you build trust with your host-nation counterpart, and how enduring that trust is, is determined by your comfort level as an advisor and with your counterpart in general.⁴⁷—STT group interview

Truly connecting and partnering with your host-nation counterpart, which is very different from advising, is personality driven and instrumental in having them retain what you teach.⁴⁸—ODA group interview

To fully understand how relationships work and how to leverage those relationships to further your advising mission, the Army needs to help us understand the science behind human behavior.⁴⁹—Level 2 SFAT advisors

Before labeling counterparts as weak or a failure due to what looks like poor performance, advisors should consider the possibility of a personality mismatch or friction. Advisees don't always sync with their advisors.⁵⁰—BDE JAG

Maturity, a calm disposition, and confidence [help] put the host-nation security force at ease.⁵¹—AWG OA

As these interview examples suggest, the selection of appropriate advisors is of critical importance. Not every good Soldier makes a good advisor,⁵² but advisors must be competent Soldiers. Every interviewee was asked to list between five and seven professional and interpersonal characteristics that they believed were most appropriate for an Advise and Assist mission. They were also asked to list them in order of importance, if possible. Motivation for this question stemmed from earlier conversations in which interviewees claimed that ill-suited Soldiers were being made advisors, with many of these individuals performing poorly. Yet, practically all respondents listed the same attributes as ideal, mentioning such skills as flexibility, professionalism, patience, respect, ability to build and maintain relationships, maturity, empathy, resilience, competence, and being a good communicator (Figure 3.1). Ironically, seven respondents followed such lists with claims that few advisors they knew had these necessary

⁴⁶ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

⁴⁷ Group interview with seven STT advisors, March 4, 2013.

⁴⁸ Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013.

⁴⁹ Interview with a U.S. Army captain (company commander) and his XO, both of whom are Level 2 SFAT advisors, March 18, 2013.

⁵⁰ Interview with a BDE JAG, March 18, 2013.

⁵¹ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁵² Training Circular (TC) 31-73.

skills. Naturally, conversations about recruitment, selection, and manning then followed. Two interviewees candidly divulged that they were ill-suited for the SFA mission, did not enjoy their jobs, and longed for more tactically oriented assignments. Eight others spoke of personality and behavioral mismatches between U.S. Army advisors and their HN counterparts. The previously mentioned SF CW3 aptly stated,

The problem is that, during the last ten years, there was an abundance of tactical and strategic-oriented jobs, and Army guys haven't accepted and internalized that combat ops aren't the main effort during this phase of the war. SFA is not just the main effort right now; it is also likely the path that future military operations will take elsewhere.⁵³

This highlights the larger, foundational problem of subpar recruitment and selection for SFA.

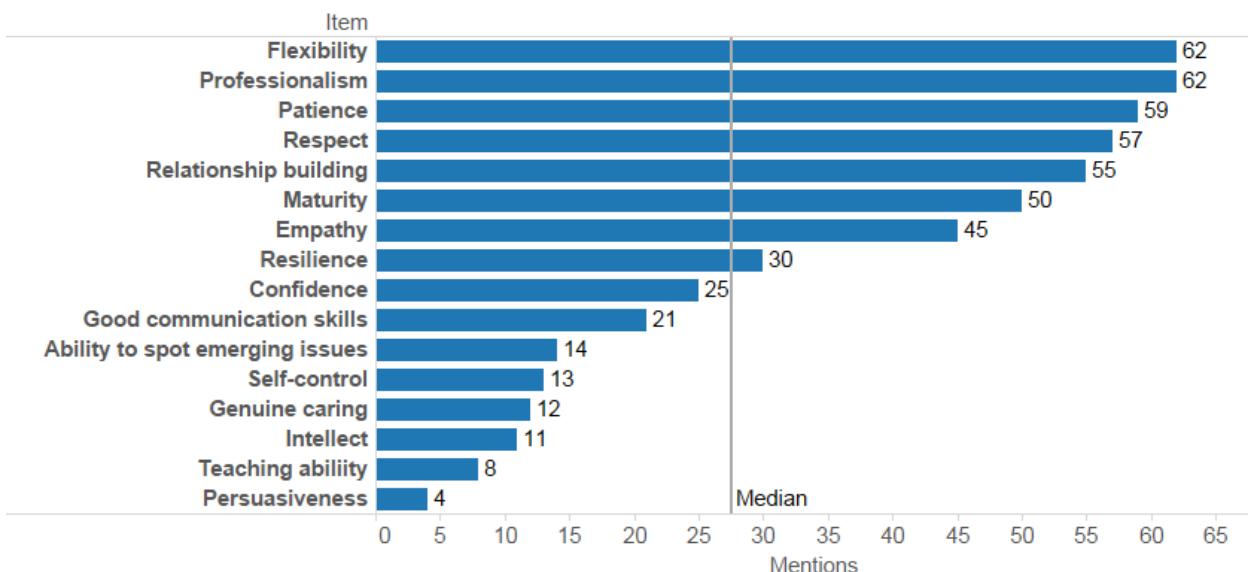
Going forward, as recruitment and training are overhauled, skills, such as flexibility, must remain at the forefront of new programs of instruction (POIs). A majority of respondents said that SFA unit commanders who manage to remain flexible and adaptable ultimately fare better. Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1 highlight the importance of flexibility by showing how valuable of a skill advisors consider it to be. And, in Table 3.1, flexibility can be considered a subset of personal courage when discussing mitigation skills as a fundamental SFA principle. This speaks to personal flexibility, but flexibility is important at all levels—personal, operational, organizational, and institutional. Operationally, advisors must be able to adapt and forge onward when major shakeups, such as personnel turnover or advisor/advisee personality conflicts, occur. Organizational flexibility may involve changes to training because of theater conditions or the need to tailor the Advise and Assist mission because of retrograde. An AWG OA discussed the difficulty of advising HNSF in which some have been exposed to military doctrine and others have not.⁵⁴ The variability of such situations requires adaptive and innovative advising strategies. Despite its importance, institutional flexibility is infrequently mentioned in current SFA doctrine. A word search for “flexibility” in FM 3-22 produces only two results. On the other hand, published lists of recommended traits for advisors—in addition to inquiries with results similar to those presented in Figure 3.1—frequently allude to the importance of flexibility. FM 3-22 §6-42 shows an example of such a list. Yet, despite listing it as one of several personality traits that greatly enhances an advisor’s ability to adapt and thrive in a foreign culture,⁵⁵ FM 3-22 does not explain *how* to cultivate flexibility in Soldiers for whom it may not be an innate trait.

⁵³ Interview with an SF AOB CW3 operations officer, March 26, 2013.

⁵⁴ Interview with AWG OA, January 5, 2013.

⁵⁵ FM 3-22, §6-42.

Figure 3.1. Advisor Skills Considered Most Essential by Interviewees



Leveraging the Observation

Personality and behavior can be just as impactful as skill proficiency or security awareness when conducting SFA missions. Conversely, getting the personality and behavioral aspect right can help ensure a successful SFA trajectory. This is why advisors who are inherently flexible and adaptive should remain top candidates for SFA missions. Current SFA doctrine may undervalue such traits; however, 62 out of 67 interviewees listed flexibility as an essential advising skill. Revamped SFA doctrine should better reflect this reality as the Department of the Army and DoD begin their foundational planning for the RAB.

A BDE chief of staff with more than six years of experience as an advisor recommended using the Army Core Values as a barometer for determining ideal candidates for Advise and Assist missions.⁵⁶ He claimed that, because direct parallels exist between the Army Core Values and the fundamental principles of SFA, candidates who willingly embrace such values would likely also make good advisors. Table 3.1 shows how the two correlate.

⁵⁶ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

Table 3.1. Relationship Between Army Core Values and Fundamental Principles of Security Force Assistance

Army Core Value	Fundamental SFA Principle
Loyalty	Advisors should remain loyal to their teams and to the SFA mission by committing maximum effort to all endeavors and maintaining consistency with those output levels.
Duty	An advisor's primary <i>duty</i> is to effectively advise his or her counterpart and actualize the mission's end state rather than his or her personal end state.
Respect	Advisors who <i>respect</i> their counterparts by learning the HN's military and political organizations and culture should expect sound results.
Selfless service	Advisors should <i>selflessly</i> focus on their counterpart's success and professionalization while recognizing the merit of the SFA mission.
Honor	Advisors should <i>honor</i> their own teams and, by extension, the U.S. Army, by selflessly performing their jobs with distinction.
Integrity	Advisors should unflinchingly retain the moral high ground, maintain their military bearing, and remain ethical during challenging circumstances in order to demonstrate their <i>integrity</i> .
Personal courage	Advisors should remain physically and mentally <i>courageous</i> and resolute when contingencies occur and mitigation is necessary.

6. The Mission's End State Must Override an Advisor's Personal End State

It is unadvertised, but two end states always exist: the end state for the advisory team and the end state for the host nation. It's when the team focuses on its own end state and success that the mission falters.⁵⁷—CSS kandak advisor

Despite what your training and advising goals may be, one end state that is automatically reached is the further professionalization of the host-nation security force[s]. By the very nature of advising, they become more capable and professional. A benchmark for professionalization is their ability to conduct train-the-trainer sessions.⁵⁸—CSS kandak advisor

Instituting measures of performance [MOPs] and measures of effectiveness [MOEs] and monitoring them for success will help you help the host nation reach its end state.⁵⁹—BDE S3

Understanding your end state means understanding how to get there quickly, because you will likely be working under some sort of time constraints. You reach that end state quickly by knowing how to leverage the host nation's culture to your benefit.⁶⁰—ODA commander

⁵⁷ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

⁵⁸ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

⁵⁹ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE S3, March 21, 2013.

⁶⁰ Interview with an ODA commander, March 27, 2013.

After establishing and measuring MOEs and MOPs, you cannot tie the potential failure of your counterpart to your performance. If they fail, [that failure] doesn't mean you are a failure.⁶¹—SFAT leader

Many younger guys end up getting emotionally entangled in the advising mission. They don't see the big picture and take it personally and feel like failures when their counterparts don't meet their expectations.⁶²—SFAT leader

Advisors are always focused on their own performance, jobs, and tasks when they need to remain focused on building capacity and [whether] their counterpart is performing well or faltering.⁶³—SFAT leader

Advising during peacetime will be different [from advising] in a protracted war. In a long war, advisors deploy to an area and immediately want to solve the accumulated problems from previous advisors. They don't manage expectations and quickly feel a sense of failure if they can't attend to those problems.⁶⁴—BDE DCO

A natural tendency for advisors to want to excel at the task at hand—coupled with concern about how they are being rated and evaluated—can inadvertently cause advisors to focus more on their personal end states and success than the mission's end state. Senior officers described this as commonly affecting younger advisors with less experience. Two different interviewees used the terminology “competing end states” to describe anxiety experienced by advisors who do not see tangible improvements with their counterparts. They end up labeling their counterparts’ failures as their own and quickly grow despondent about the advising mission. Many forget that the absence of codified MOEs and MOPs in an SFA mission invites such frustration. However, establishment of evaluation metrics at the tactical or team level solves only a portion of the problem. Selfless service and acknowledging the intangibles of advising can rectify the remainder of the issue. In this context, *selfless service* implies supplanting one’s gratification needs with one’s counterpart’s needs. A BDE S3 described some advisors as being so focused on their personal jobs and tasks that they were failing to build capacity with their counterparts.⁶⁵

Leveraging the Observation

SFA teams must do more than develop MOEs and MOPs for evaluation of their mission objectives. The challenge is a steep one and will require teams and individuals to also reorient how they think. One interviewee said that everyone in the Army is accustomed to a performance/reward system: People work hard, accomplish the task at hand, and are rewarded as a result. The reward can come in many forms (spoken recognition, receiving an award, or

⁶¹ Interview with an SFAT leader, March 25, 2013.

⁶² Interview with an SFAT leader, March 25, 2013.

⁶³ Interview with an SFAT leader, March 25, 2013.

⁶⁴ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE DCO, March 21, 2013.

⁶⁵ Interview with a BDE S3, March 25, 2013.

advancing in rank), but the message is that individuals are compensated for their performance. SFA in future theaters may see advisors working with HNSF that, for cultural reasons, are less communicative or expressive than the advisors might prefer. This may make observing and assessing progress difficult and, according to eight respondents, may invoke feelings of failure in some advisors. Such situations will require advisors to retain their confidence and trust that their counterparts have internalized their instructions. Advisors will have to exercise patience, and they should not expect improvements to be necessarily visible nor immediate.⁶⁶

Advisors can focus beyond themselves by having a well-defined advising mission with a realistic end state; an advisor focusing on his or her personal end states may result from the absence of a strategy that is closely tied to the operating environment in question or from a lack of his or her understanding of how the advising effort contributes to the overall campaign objectives.

7. An Advisor Must Maintain Mental Fortitude

Advising requires so much mental and cerebral energy. To this day, it is the most mentally tasking job I have ever had in the Army. Because of this, you have to ensure that advisors want to be advisors. Ensure [that] they are committed and invested.⁶⁷—CSS kandak advisor

Advisors must detach themselves from what they have been previously taught about instant gratification in the Army, where you get rewarded or praised for hard work invested. Advising is about the immeasurable intangibles, which frustrates many people.⁶⁸—CSS kandak advisor

Advisors [who] end up doing future Advise and Assist assignments in places like Africa will be surprised at how much easier and enjoyable this is the second time around. It's doing it the first time that requires the mental toughness many can't find.⁶⁹—BDE lieutenant colonel

Expect to take baby steps forward and huge leaps back.⁷⁰—BDE lieutenant colonel

Nine interviewees identically described being an SFA advisor as the most difficult job they have had in the Army. All who reached this conclusion were senior officers with previous advising experience who were familiar with the rigors of the job. They also said that they expected SFA to be equally challenging in other environments, such as the AFRICOM area of responsibility (AOR), because of the inherent difficulties of the job. Many of these challenges

⁶⁶ Interview with an AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

⁶⁷ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

⁶⁸ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

⁶⁹ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE lieutenant colonel, March 21, 2013.

⁷⁰ Interview with a U.S. Army BDE chief of staff, March 21, 2013.

were mentioned in the previous section that discussed how hard it is to see the fruit of one's labor. Because of this, it is often said that advisors must maintain mental and cerebral fortitude while advising. Remaining patient when one's counterpart may not meet one's expectations is an imperative, but so is employing creativity and being adaptive when stymied over how to connect with one's advisee. Optimistically, despite the continual need for mental toughness and creativity while advising, four out of nine of the interviewees mentioned above said that advising gets easier with subsequent deployments. Advisors who currently struggle with problems, such as evaluating MOEs and MOPs and positively affecting their counterparts, should find navigation of those issues easier in the future. The problems themselves may not disappear, but mitigation strategies should become more familiar and easier to employ with experience.

Leveraging the Observation

Advisors will need to remain confident, motivated, and self-assured while conducting Advise and Assist missions in the future. The responsibility resides partially with the individual and partially with the Department of the Army (DA). The advisor must spot the warning signs of frustration, mental fatigue, or demoralization and communicate them to the remainder of the SFA team. Collaboratively, the team can work on raising morale and mitigating whatever problem may exist between the advisor and advisee. HQDA and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) are responsible for the broader institutional solution. As discussed earlier, a new narrative espousing the value of SFA is needed. However, this narrative must be far reaching and must discuss the difficulty of advising and the related coping strategies.

8. Revamped Security Force Assistance Doctrine Can Function as a Mobilizer

SFA doctrine would be helpful if it fully captured how to understand the power dynamics within the unit you are advising. For example, is unlikely that a new SFA doctrine, regardless of how current it may be, can help you decide how to adjust your advising strategy if you're working with a weak leader who has a strong staff or, conversely, a strong leader who has a weak staff.⁷¹—CSS kandak advisor

In the SOF community, we see our FID doctrine as providing a base or foundation. And once you master the foundation, you can adjust, master, and tailor your mission as you see fit.⁷²—ODA group interview

SFA doctrine can only be so useful. Americans are good at being adaptable and flexible so that they can accomplish the mission. They are good at outside-the-

⁷¹ Interview with a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel from a CSS kandak, March 26, 2013.

⁷² Group interview with nine ODA operators, March 29, 2013.

box thinking, and having a rigid SFA doctrine will be too binding and stifling.⁷³—Level 2 SFAT advisors

The advising community could better benefit from several well-written books on U.S. military advisors throughout history than another book on Army doctrine.⁷⁴—SFAT group interview

The absence of an identifiable SFA doctrine affected our training. We were unable to point to any single document that could help us understand how to function and operate as an advisor.⁷⁵—GSU SFAT advisors

Asking advisors whether they were familiar with, and regularly referred to, a doctrine on SFA followed a spate of interviewees mentioning how ill-trained and ill-prepared they felt after training. Surprisingly, 39 interviewees said that they were either unaware of present doctrine, such as FM 3-22, the earlier FM 3-07.1, or TC 31-73, or claimed rarely to have used what did exist. The question was designed to see whether current SFA doctrine could fill many of the information gaps that remained after training. Remembering how instrumental military and academic counterinsurgency (COIN) literature had been when the United States and international community were asked to familiarize themselves with that particular method of warfare, we thought it plausible that SFA literature would accomplish the same objectives. It also seemed likely that a well-written, universally referenced doctrine underscoring the U.S. national security imperative of the Advise and Assist mission could mobilize enthusiasm for SFA. Various literature does exist, such as CALL documents; Army FMs; informative military websites, such as JCISFA's; and IJC documents on SFA. However, interviewees suggested that SFA practitioners in the field rarely utilized these sites and resources with any regularity, preventing them from having the galvanizing effect hoped for.

Leveraging the Observation

Thirty-two interviewees said that having access to a comprehensive SFA doctrine for future advising missions was not so essential. And 28 of these 32 respondents said that it was more crucial for advisors to retain and practice the key principles of SFA. Although some thought doctrine to be the best way to capture such principles, others described them as being intuitive and instead feared that more Army doctrine would limit creativity and resourcefulness. This complements a parallel argument regarding rigidity versus ambiguity. SF ODAs claim to use their FID document as a foundational tool only and feel that doctrinal rigidity would limit their ability to excel in ambiguous circumstances. Some SFATs and STTs concurred with this statement, but others felt that utilizing doctrine actually prevented ambiguity in the first place

⁷³ Interview with a U.S. Army captain (company commander) and his XO, both of whom are Level 2 SFAT advisors, March 18, 2013.

⁷⁴ Group interview with three SFAT advisors who train an ANA BDE, March 20, 2013.

⁷⁵ Group interview with two SFAT advisors who train a GSU SFAT, March 20, 2013.

and therefore increased odds for success. The ambiguity conundrum is brought up often when speculating about SFA in other theaters, such as Africa, where, unlike in Afghanistan, the United States has spent considerable less effort in past decades. One way to bridge the gap between rigid doctrine and ambiguous context is to create theater-specific guidance, such as the recently published “ISAF SFA Guide.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ ISAF, 2013.

Chapter Four. Sustainability of Security Force Assistance Results: The Development Paradox and Host-Nation Autonomy

Canvassing the vast network of current SFA advisors and collecting their insights is relatively easy. The harder task is determining which of those lessons learned are actually implementable and sustainable for SFA operations in the future. In this chapter, we therefore explore interviewees' observations pertaining to how SFA operational challenges may be better met in the future. Several interviewees spoke of the importance of understanding not only the challenges and successes faced by past SFA endeavors but those faced by the HNs themselves. We address these concerns through the lens of the Development Paradox, a concept rooted in economic development literature but also appropriate here. The Development Paradox postulates that developing states are incapable of maintaining perpetuity, or permanence, with their key institutions because they allow themselves the option to "adjust" if a civic, societal, or governmental institution performs in a substandard way.⁷⁷ The decision to disband problematic institutions and start anew becomes favored over options to reform and rehabilitate poor performers—leading to a high turnover of institutions and government officials. For example, a mitigation strategy for an underperforming president may be a coup d'état, and a president's answer to civic unrest and mass demonstrations may be the suppression of human rights. This may lead to permanently immature institutions because, when developing states like these face crises, they often go through dramatic transformations that revise institutions, doctrine, and policies, making it difficult to sustain their previous organizational structure and institutional knowledge.⁷⁸

In the context of SFA, the paradox suggests that *the more likely a country is to need SFA because of immature or unprofessional security institutions, the harder it will be to sustain any of the gains they may acquire through SFA if they are quick to revert to the status quo ante as difficulties are encountered.* The examples are many, and military, law enforcement, and security institutions, all of which are candidates for SFA, are as vulnerable as political institutions.

As a result, SFA efforts—because they are connected to such institutions—can be quickly invalidated (or even turned against the interests of the United States) despite best intentions in implementation and sustainability. The Development Paradox reminds all security cooperation practitioners that the changes they seek to make in a HN, no matter how well intended, may be

⁷⁷ The core components of the Development Paradox, as discussed in the context of SFA, originate from Weingast, 2009.

⁷⁸ Weingast, 2009.

incremental, discontinuous, or even only temporary if the HN's organizations and citizenry are not able to provide the support needed for lasting change.

Leveraging the Observation

To the extent possible, efforts should be taken to guard against the Development Paradox. Understanding past relations between the HN and former sponsors of military aid efforts, as well as between the HN government and organizations within the HN, need to be considered in the SFA planning stage. It is possible that socioeconomic factors will play a more prominent role than purely military aspects in determining whether the achievements of SFA are retained or lost in future operations because security institutions will need steady support to mature.

In addition, five of the SF ODA members interviewed expressed concern regarding the determination of end states and relationships between the HN and SFA providers. Current efforts in Afghanistan, and earlier efforts in Iraq, were characterized by the United States and CF unilaterally making decisions about SFA and having significant resources available to put toward it. However, one can assume that, under peacetime conditions, in which the United States is a guest in a country rather than an occupying force, SFA or FID will happen differently. The initial request for training will most likely come from the HN, not the United States, and will, in large measure, determine the end state of the SFA mission. Deciding the nuances of the end state will likely also be a collaborative effort that is driven mostly by the HN. Compared with past efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, HNs in future peacetime conditions, as sovereign states, will exercise more autonomy. To succeed with SFA in scenarios significantly different from Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army will have accept that it is in a supporting and enabling role—one in which the preservation of HN legitimacy takes primacy.

This alleviates some of the current concerns about SFA teams delineating realistic end states early on and practicing expectation management throughout the advising mission. The uniqueness of the current practice by which individual SFATs, STTs, and other SFA units determine the end states of their advising missions will likely not be replicated in future theaters. Step 2 in Figure 2.3 in Chapter Two, which depicts an aspirational model of SFA based on the responses gathered for this study, shows how end states are likely to be determined in future SFA missions.

Chapter Five. Conclusion

In order to inform the policy and doctrine discussion on SFA, this study endeavored to capture the insights of experienced SFA practitioners in the field. We realize that much research has been done in this area already, but the thoughts of SFA advisors currently working in Afghanistan provides an additional set of data points to ongoing policy and doctrine development. The interview responses presented in this document illustrate that, despite the decade-plus of research and discussions on this topic, solutions to long-standing SFA challenges still need to be sought.

Discussion of the Development Paradox in Chapter Four highlights a range of variables that may affect SFA operations in the wider global context. As suggested by the advisors commenting on future SFA operations, attending to the history, social milieu, existing organizations, and past military operations in an area is key to facilitating strong HN security institutions. The U.S. Army should endeavor to control the variables that are directly within its reach—the training, resourcing execution, and knowledge management aspects of SFA—and focus less on elusive HN factors that are beyond its ability to influence.

The value of the interviewees' insights presented throughout this report lies in their origin—current advisors at the front lines of SFA, who struggle on a daily basis to improve their skills in highly challenging environments, have firsthand knowledge of what is needed in these operations. The insights should be reviewed with the understanding that forecasting about future SFA environments is an imprecise practice. Nineteen respondents stated that Advise and Assist missions will play a prominent role across combatant commands (COCOMs) in the future, but the average length and composition of such missions vary. Given that ambiguity, some recommendations gleaned from the insights offered in this report may be applicable to longer SFA missions that span many months, while others may pertain to shorter missions.

Recommendations

- **Modernize Army advising and combat-related narratives to generate capable and confident SFA advisors.** Twenty-five interviewees identified this as the first step to incentivizing the SFA mission. Rather than having advising and combat roles compete for prestige and prominence, the Army can portray both as being mission essential—and linked. Revamping SFA doctrine to portray the professionalization of HNSF as the first line of defense in preventing war is a start. The rest of the effort lies with incentivizing advisors, having military leaders challenge their Soldiers to accept and excel at Advise

and Assist missions, designating these mission as KD,⁷⁹ and ensuring that they are as professionally rewarding as Combat Arms positions.

- **Recognize that good training takes time.**⁸⁰ SFA operations are complex, and Army institutions and other necessary parties would benefit from revamping their manning and training processes and internalize the truism that well-trained SFA teams that have genuine camaraderie; smart, charismatic, and motivated advisors; and the necessary commitment to do the job correctly will improve their operational outcomes.
- **Aggressively leverage the experience and institutional knowledge gained by SF conducting FID.** This can be done by conducting joint training exercises with the RAF that focus on relationship building and maintaining rapport with HNSF during challenging circumstances.
- **Remain focused on operations and security.** Advisors should remain “switched on” and have both a contingency plan and contingency kit to ensure the safety of their teams because peaceful environments can morph into threatening ones at any point.⁸¹ Advisors should know the location of major trauma centers and hospitals in their operational environments. Other precautions should be taken, such as ensuring availability of PLBs and other personnel recovery tools.
- **Continue to seek out the best candidates.** During SFA selection and training, candidates who are flexible and adaptable and who uphold the Army Core Values given their similarity to the key principles of SFA should be sought out with a new degree of vigor. Those values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage.
- **Ensure that attention to the mission’s end state overrides attention to advisors’ personal end states.** A natural tendency to want to excel at the advising mission, coupled with concern about how they are being rated and evaluated, can inadvertently cause advisors to focus more on their personal end states and success than on the mission’s overall end state. Conscious efforts must be made to guard against this, and advisors need to stay focused on their primary task of building capacity with their HN counterparts.
- **Maintain mental and cerebral fortitude while advising.** SFA missions can be frustrating, and advisors should remain resolute if their counterparts fail to meet their expectations. They should also employ creativity when stymied over to how connect with their advisees.
- **Communicate and adhere to existing doctrine.** Army leaders who exert maximum effort in acquainting new and seasoned advisors with the recently published FM 3-22 doctrine should find it beneficial. More than half of the 67 advisors who were interviewed claimed to be unaware of current SFA doctrine. However, Chapters Four, Five, and Six of FM 3-22 contain guidance and instruction on many of the topics respondents felt overwhelmed by, such as understanding mission essential SFA tasks,

⁷⁹ The problem of advisors’ jobs not being considered KD is particularly acute with SFATs that are cobbled together from different units, as is often the case in the current Afghan theater. During the course of this study, RAND researchers were told that this problem would likely be absent in the case of an SFAB, or unit whose sole mission is to Advise and Assist HNSF.

⁸⁰ Results of HQ IJC CJ7 SFAT Lessons Learned Section, 2012.

⁸¹ Interview with AWG OA, March 6, 2013.

SFA predeployment and redeployment activities, and the types of skills they should possess as advisors.

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The U.S. Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) requested that the RAND Corporation conduct a study on how to leverage observations from Security Force Assistance (SFA) efforts in Afghanistan for global operations. Researchers interviewed 67 advisors and SFA practitioners at the tactical and operational levels to collect their firsthand insights into SFA. Interviewees included members of security force assistance teams and Special Forces Operational Detachments–Alpha, senior leadership at the brigade level, and AWG Operational Advisers. The enduring nature of most of these challenges suggests that solutions still remain uncertain. Future SFA missions, such as those envisioned for the Army's Regionally Aligned Forces, can benefit from the experience gained from SFA in Afghanistan as captured in this report. These lessons need to be incorporated both at the institutional level and by individual SFA advisers.



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